

Sketch of Heber City, Utah
1850-1920

Nestled high in the Wasatch Mountains is a lovely valley, protected by a circle of friendly hills, with majestic Timpanogos rising high as a sentinel. Lush green meadows border the banks of the Provo River that runs through the center of this bowl-like paradise.

Perhaps the first white men to view this beautiful valley were Catholic priests. In 1776 Father Dominguez and Father Escalante are believed to have traveled along the Strawberry, through Diamond Fork into Spanish Fork Canyon and then to the shores of Utah Lake. Between this visit and the beginning of settlements in 1858, only hunters and trappers frequented the area in search of beaver and mink. Often they followed the paths and trails made by the Indians. The area was also explored in 1852 by men looking for timber, and they found it was plentiful in the upper valleys of the Provo and the Weber Rivers.

One summer morning in 1857, a group of workmen at a sawmill in Big Cottonwood Canyon decided to spend the day at the rumored "paradise land" in the tops of the Wasatch Mountains. The men hiked to the summit of the range, then came over the ridge to Snake Creek and followed the river down into the valley. They brought back glowing reports of a desirable agricultural valley.

Regardless of rumors that there was frost every month of the year in the valley of the Provo, many people were anxious to settle there.

The first steps toward settlement came in July, 1858, when a party of men, with a surveyor, J. W. Snow of Provo, went up to the valley and laid out a section of ground just north of the present site of Heber City. Here twenty-acre tracts were surveyed, and each man in the party selected his farm.

The construction of the Provo Canyon road was the initial step in the settling of Provo Valley. As early as 1852 William Gardner said, "Provo Canyon is the best canyon for a road that I have seen, having fine narrow valleys, with rich soil and good pastures."

By the summer of 1858, timber was badly needed, so the building of the road began. The river had to be bridged at the mouth of the canyon. This crude road that twisted its way up the canyon from Provo City to the grass-covered valley some twenty-five miles away was significant in the settlement of Wasatch County.

Interest in the valley was divided between groups. The abundance of grass and water seemed ideal for stock rais-

From: "James & Mary Murray Murdoch
Farm Hist

History of Heber City

ing, but as an agricultural venture, some felt the climate was too cold and the growing season was too short, but many were willing to experiment with farming in the valley. The cattle raisers made the first attempt at settlement. In the summer of 1858 three men, George Bean, Aaron Daniels, and William Wall, drove stock up the canyon to feed on the meadow grass along the Provo River.

On April 29, 1859, a group of ten men, serious about settling, came to Provo Valley and were surprised to find three men from Juab County, William Davidson, Robert Broadhead, and James Davis, plowing a strip of ground.

The company from Provo moved their wagons to a spring which they had discovered on the east side of the valley. Here they built a wickiup of poles covered with willows, wheat grass, and dirt. It was large enough to hold thirty men. The spring was called "London Spring" as many of the men had come originally from Great Britain. The shelter was shared with the groups that soon followed and became known as the "London Wickiup." The spring still bears the name.

The first order of business was for each man to claim his section of land, either twenty or forty acres, and as quickly as possible to prepare the ground for planting. Much of the earth was covered with sagebrush, which was very thick and hard to clear. But they cleared away the brush and planted the seeds--the seeds of crops and the seeds of a new home for themselves and their loved ones.

The men started building log houses. They decided to build close together in a fort, so they could protect themselves from the Indians if necessary. The houses were built of green cottonwood logs that were cut on the river bottoms. They had dirt floors and dirt roofs, with mud packed between the logs. By winter many of the men decided to return to Provo for the winter months, but eighteen families were established in the fort, and they resolved to stay the winter.

During the first summer some one thousand bushels of grain were raised in the valley. Because there was no grist mill, the settlers ground the wheat in small hand mills or boiled the wheat and ate it whole with milk.

To feed the cattle for the winter, it was necessary to cut meadow hay and swamp grass. It proved to be a very hard task, as they had to cut it by hand with a scythe.

For those who remained in the valley, the first winter was a long and dreary one. In November the snow came early, and in December the weather turned intensely cold. For nearly four months they were without communication from the rest of the world. During Christmas week a group of young people from Provo braved the weather and came through the canyon by sleigh and spent the holidays with families in the valley. They enjoyed a gay round of dancing and amusement until New Year's Day. Then they returned home. From then until March there were no visitors and no mail, only bitter cold weather. But this did not mean the settlers sat twiddling their thumbs

or had long faces--quite the opposite. Meeting in the various homes, they held church meetings on the Sabbath Day and during the week gathered for dancing, singing, and dramatics.

By the end of March the snow was still deep and there was no sign of spring. Some began to get discouraged. So it was decided to hold a fast meeting at the home of Thomas Rasband to seek the help of the Lord. They prayed sincerely and earnestly that the Lord would cause the snow to melt and spring to come so that their famished oxen and cows might get grass to eat, and that they could plant their crops and be in touch with friends in the lower valleys. Before the meeting was dismissed there was water dripping from the eaves of the house, and spring was born in the valley.

When spring, 1860, came to Provo Valley, as the newly settled area was called because of the Provo River, an influx of new settlers came from all the surrounding territory. News that grain had matured encouraged many to come. They were anxious to secure homes and water rights while good land was still available. They came for several reasons, but each one had a desire for freedom from want and freedom to worship God and live as he chose.

In the early summer William W. Wall was appointed Presiding Elder, with John M. Murdoch and James Laird as his counselors.

About this time the Saints began planning a July Twenty-fourth celebration, and some suggested a bowery should be built for the occasion. Brother John M. Murdoch said with just a little more effort a meetinghouse could be built that could serve as a church, school, dance hall, theater, and so on. Enthusiastically, everyone approved the idea, and logs were brought from the hills, stone was quarried for the two fireplaces and chimneys that stood at each end of the building, and the structure was completed and used for the Pioneer Day celebration. It was twenty feet by forty feet and was erected inside the fort string of houses. Even though it had only a dirt floor and hand-hewn furniture, the people rejoiced and gave thanks for it.

It was the duty of the deacons to make the fires for the church house. They were to furnish the wood, kindle the fires, and keep them fueled. It took nearly one-half cord of wood each Sunday to keep the fires going.

The new little town was named Heber, after Heber C. Kimball, a counselor to Brigham Young.

Along with building homes, the people began building barns and stables and other shelters for their oxen and cattle.

Because the animals grazed in open range lands during the summer, it was necessary to build fences to protect precious crops. The most common type of fence was the worm or zigzag fence. It was made of poles, but required no nails or wire to build.

For the harvest in 1860, a threshing machine was brought into the valley. It was run with horses as the source of

power and threshed very slowly.

The prospects of winter looked better, as the people were now more adequately prepared. To help pass the time, a dramatic group was organized. They looked forward to regular church services and a choir was formed. Schools were conducted through the winter for the education of the people.

More than sixty families spent the winter of 1860-61 in the fort. There were such family names as Carlile, Crook, Rasband, Giles, Duke, Boren, Davie, Broadhead, Oaks, Johnson, Rooker, Dameron, Lamon, Lee, Sessions, Jones, Thomas, Cummings, Walton, Carroll, Sprouse, Hicken, Thompson, Jacobs, Moulton, Forman, Muir, Murdoch, Todd, Henry, Clotworthy, Palmer, Burns, McDonald, Hamilton, Clyde, Witt, and Jordan. Many of these names are still prominent in the valley.

By 1861 the Church leaders organized Heber into a ward and sent Joseph S. Murdock from American Fork to be the bishop. His counselors were John W. Witt and Thomas Rasband.

Another bridge was built over the Provo River, this one six miles north of Heber on the road to Salt Lake City. A good wagon road was made through Provo Canyon with toll being charged for the use of the road, so transportation was improved.

John M. Murdoch organized a cooperative sheep herd in 1860 and cared for the sheep during the summer months himself. He was able to take the sheep far enough south to winter that they did not need special supplies of hay. This method of caring for the sheep enabled nearly everyone to have a few sheep to furnish wool for spinning and weaving into a cloth called "jean." Practically everyone wore clothing made from this type of cloth. Wool was also used to knit stockings.

Many of the settlers built two-room log houses. Everyone was busy; there was work for all. From the beef fat, tallow candles were made. The fat was also used in soap making. The settlers' menu included wheat, dried service berries, ground cherries, and squash. The cows provided milk from which butter and cheese were produced.

Wasatch County was created in 1862. It was bound on the west by the summit of the Wasatch Range, on the north by Summit County, on the east by the territorial line between Utah and Colorado, and on the south by Sanpete County. Heber was named the county seat.

In 1862 the property value in the valley was assessed at \$48,350.00.

When Johnston's Army was summoned to return to the east, the troops passed through the valley on their way. They sold some of their wagons and supplies very cheaply to the settlers of Provo Valley rather than carry them back. The settlers traded vegetables and grain to the troops for old wagon covers and seamless sacks. In John Crook's journal he says, "The material we got in this way furnished us with about all the common wearing apparel we could get in those days, and men

thought themselves well dressed when when they had canvas suits consisting of pants and jumper made from an old wagon sheet"

Shoes were equally scarce. Many went without shoes. When leather soles wore out, the uppers were nailed to wooden soles.

William Lindsay tells of winters with four feet of snow on the ground. He says, "We had no overcoats, overshoes, or underwear, and how we were able to stand the cold going to the canyons for wood with our ox teams and sleds in the deep snow is hard to understand, unless we acknowledge that the hand of the Lord was over us."

By 1877 the area had grown sufficiently that the Wasatch Stake was organized, with former bishop Abram Hatch called as the first stake president, and Heber was divided into two wards. Ten years after the stake was formed the stake tabernacle was built at a cost of over \$30,000.00.

The members of the Church built churches in the various settlements--churches where they could worship God.

The Relief Society was first established in the Heber Ward in 1869.

The first Sunday School meetings held in the valley were at the homes of the members, and as wards were organized they included the Sunday School. The Y.L.M.I.A. was organized in 1872 and in 1879 Y.L.M.I.A.s were carried out in some of the wards. The Primary was organized in 1879. The priesthood quorums were set up at the time of the organization of the stake.

The Church has always been an important phase in the lives of the people of this valley.

Small schools were soon developed in each of the communities of the valley. Children of all ages met together in one room where they were taught the three Rs. There were not many trained teachers in the area, so young men and women who had attended school taught in the various classrooms.

In 1866 it became necessary for Wasatch County to organize infantry and cavalry companies, that they might better protect themselves from the Indians. The men had to furnish their own guns and ammunition. The Indians made seven raids on this county and nearly always got away with valuable stock. Two hundred and seventy-five men were enrolled to protect the valley in this Blackhawk War. John M. Murdoch was a Captain of an infantry company. Peace was made in the spring of 1867.

The first few years in the valley several different men started merchandising businesses, but their attempts were fruitless. No one had any money, and the stock of goods in the log cabin stores was small and had to be hauled many miles to Heber. The event that was to change this picture was the stagecoach contract. In 1862 Ben Holliday took over the stagecoach route and government mail contract between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California. Salt Lake City was the center of the route and the hub for the branch lines

that extended to towns and mining camps in Southern Utah, Idaho, Nevada, and Montana.

Every ten or twelve miles along the route were stations where hay and grain were kept to supply the horses and mules for the stagecoach.

In 1863 John W. Witt of Heber was given a contract to supply oats to the stations as far east as Green River. Under this contract, men and teams and wagons periodically set out from Heber to the supply stations. There was work for everyone who owned a wagon. John Crook said, "This was the beginning of good times for Heber. Plenty of money rolled in. Grain kept raising until oats sold for \$3.00 a bushel and wheat for \$5.00. Merchandise was high, also. Stoves were \$150.00 to \$200.00 each. Sugar and nails were \$1.00 per pound. Factory and prints cost 50¢ to \$1.00 per yard. A good wagon cost \$300.00."

Two of the early successful business enterprises in Heber were Abram Hatch's store and Mark Jeffs' store. The Hatch store later became the Heber Exchange, and Mark Jeffs' store was incorporated into the Heber Mercantile. These stores ran competition to each other for many years.

Of all the phases of pioneer life which were to test the ingenuity, resourcefulness, and cooperative spirit of the people, irrigation was foremost. Water was precious to those who hoped to farm the semi-arid Wasatch valleys. At times there was fierce competition among the settlers. The Provo River winds through the center of the valley, and there were several large creeks such as Lake Creek, Center Creek, Daniels Creek, Snake Creek, and Round Valley Creek, along with several springs from which the people irrigated. They also dug canals by hand. Two prominent ones were the Timpanogos Canal and the Wasatch Canal, also called the "Big Ditch."

In 1878 reservoirs to conserve the water were started east of Heber in Center Creek Canyon. It took many years to complete them, but they were some of the first water storage projects in Utah.

Many fine sandstone buildings and homes were erected in the area because of the availability of the sandrock at the quarry east of Heber.

In 1905 Heber installed a water system and by 1909 the Heber Power Plant was built, so electric power came to the valley.

Within a few decades after the first settlers, Heber Valley became a flourishing, growing group of communities. It was a desirable place to live, and offered future development. The cultivated lands had turned into beautiful, thriving farms. Businesses of most kinds lined the main street.

It was in this beautiful, tranquil valley that the Murdochs from Scotland cast their lots. John M. Murdoch arrived here in 1860; Mary Murdoch Mair came in 1866; and in

1878 William Murdoch and Veronica Murdoch Caldwell joined their brother and sister. From this valley they received protection, freedom, opportunity, and challenge. They in turn met the challenge, and in return for a peaceful, secure, beautiful home they gave allegiance, hard work, leadership, devotion, their talents, faith, and love. They are a part of the valley, as the valley is a part of them.

Today the valley is known as "Beautiful Heber Valley, Paradise of the Rockies." (Information from How Beautiful upon the Mountains and Under Wasatch Skies.)

The Timpanogos Valley

Of all the vales of Utah there's one I love the best
Watered by Timpanogos stream and near the Wasatch crest.
Though high up in the mountains and covered oft with snow
I love its rugged canyons and the peaceful vale below.
I love these grand old mountains that round this valley stand
The cold and sparkling fountains that cool the thirsty land
The rich and fertile valley, its crops of grain and hay
The green grass on the hillsides in April and in May.
I came here in my boyhood, my age was then fifteen
Like others I had crossed the plains with plodding slow ox teams
To gather up to Zion, the dear land of the free.
For sixty years I've lived here and led a happy life
T'was here I grew to manhood; T'was here I won my wife
It was here we raised our family, our dearest girls and boys.
It was here I've made my dearest friends and had my greatest joys.
It is here my dear old mother lies, my dearest Mary too
Three of my own dear children and many friends I knew.
And when my time on earth is done, it's here I want to rest
Beneath these grand old mountains near those I love the best.

--William Lindsay
January 18, 1923

*From "The James & Mary Murdoch Family
History"*

(Put together by Phyllis Van Wagoner and Virginia Christensen.)

